

Dear Chairs Flexer and Fox, Vice Chairs Haskell and Thomas, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco, and Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee,

My name is Julia Sulkowski and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for **S.B. 184, An Act Extending Through November 8, 2022, Several Changes Regarding Election Administration as a Result of COVID-19 and Concerning Eligibility to Vote by Absentee Ballot**. This bill would make the pandemic an acceptable excuse for requesting an absentee ballot for the 2022 midterm election, following similar decisions for 2020 and 2021 elections in Connecticut. The recent spike in COVID-19 cases is still fresh in our minds, serving as a reminder that the pandemic is still very much present and constantly changing. We do not know what the state of the world will be in November; for that reason, it is critical that voters are given the autonomy to vote in whatever manner will best serve the health of both them and their families in 2022.

***By increasing accessibility to ballots, no single party is favored and there is overall increased engagement.*** A 2020 study found that implementing universal vote-by-mail (a step farther than this bill goes) does not favor one party over another in turnout within the party or in the election itself. The same study saw a 2% increase on average in overall voter turnout in states that had implemented universal vote-by-mail. In the 2020 election, increased access to absentee ballots nationwide did not affect partisan turnout OR overall turnout, per a 2021 study. Even if increased access to absentee voting has ambiguous effects on turnout, it will allow voters the crucial choice to cast their ballots in the form that makes them feel safest amidst the pandemic.

***Connecticut is lagging in a new national precedent to offer easily accessible mail-in ballots.*** Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, Nevada, Washington, California (starting this year), and Vermont (only for general elections)—states with a variety of political climates—all conduct elections using almost entirely mail-in ballots. There is no correlation between universal vote-by-mail and voter fraud; voter fraud is rare in these states, with only sixteen provenly fraudulent ballots being cast in these seven states combined since 2020, per a database for conservative think-tank The Heritage Foundation. Twenty-six of our fifty states, along with the District of Columbia, allow registered voters to vote via absentee ballot with no excuse in any election; Connecticut is not one of them. Connecticut successfully allowed effectively no-excuse absentee voting for the 2020 Presidential election in light of the pandemic, which unfortunately continues to rage on through 2022; fewer than 1% of absentee ballots were rejected for any reason, and there was no significant increase in credible reports of voter fraud.

***During the pandemic, voting presents a health risk for certain individuals. CT should be supporting our voters, not pushing them from engagement.*** A review of the April 2020 Presidential primary in Wisconsin traced at least fifty-two cases of COVID-19 to in-person voting, with a substantial increase in cases in the weeks following the primary. This was shown to be especially true in areas with more population density and fewer precincts, which would undoubtedly have a disproportionate effect on low-income and Black/Brown voters. The Omicron variant of COVID-19 is far more contagious than any variants we faced in the early stages of the pandemic, and the new BA.2 variant is 30% more transmissible even than Omicron. As we enter the third year of the pandemic, it is clear that COVID-19 is unpredictable and can mutate and resurge at any time; it is crucial to have measures in place to protect the electoral process if the pandemic continues and/or worsens come November. Restricting access to early/absentee ballots forces voters to vote on Election Day; if they contract COVID-19 in the days

*leading up to November 8, they will then have to choose to forfeit their Constitutional right to vote or to put the lives of their fellow voters in danger. Justice for immunocompromised and senior-citizen voters requires giving them the option to vote from the safety of their homes rather than risking their health to vote in-person, especially given that Connecticut is lifting its mask mandate.*

In conclusion, I urge you to support S.B. 184 and provide equal access to the ballot for all, regardless of their comfort level during the pandemic. Especially with COVID-19 having a disproportionately dangerous impact on Black, Brown, and low-income communities and individuals, there is no reason to force voters to cast their ballots in person during a time of such strong uncertainty. Senior citizens, immunocompromised voters, Black/Brown voters, low-income voters, and any voters afraid of contracting COVID-19 at the polls deserve to participate in the midterm election—and every election, for that matter—without feeling as if they must risk their lives to do so, and absentee voting will provide all Connecticut voters with that comfort. I implore you to favorably vote this bill out of the Government Administration and Elections Committee so that every voter can feel safe exercising their Constitutional right to vote this election season.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Julia Sulkowski  
New Haven, CT